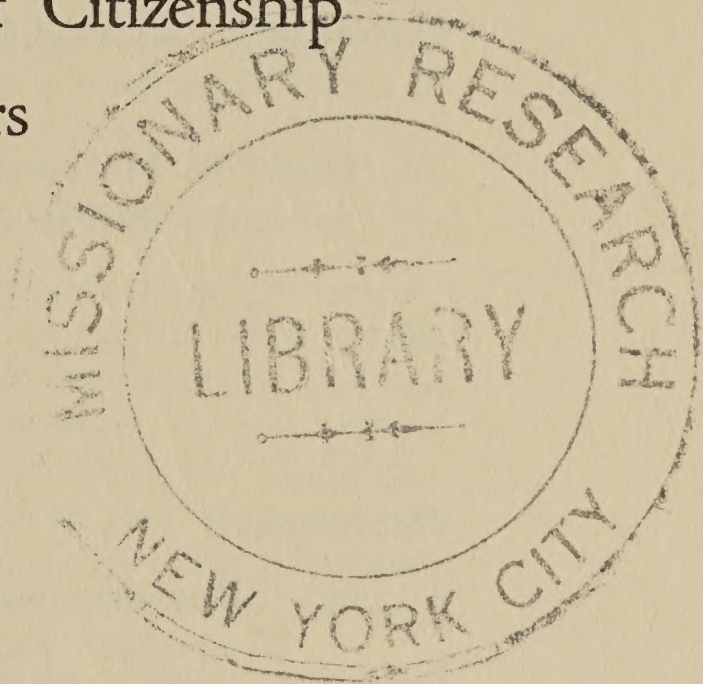
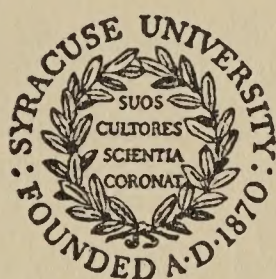


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Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship
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*American Students Abroad:
Goodwill Ambassadors?*

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF AMERICANS FOR OVERSEAS SERVICE

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Publications

1. "Education and Training for Public Service Overseas." 23 October 1956 (out of print)
2. "One Hundred Thousand Americans At Work Abroad: A Challenge to American Education," 15 January 1957 (out of print)
3. "Americans at Work Abroad"—papers prepared for a conference at The Maxwell School, 6-8 March 1957 (out of print)
4. "American Business and Overseas Employment," 15 June 1957
5. "The Art of Overseasmanship," Syracuse University Press, September 1957. \$3.00
6. "American Students Abroad: Goodwill Ambassadors?" 28 January 1958

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American Students Abroad: Goodwill Ambassadors?

In recent years many sententious words have been written about Americans travelling beyond our borders and how they "represent" the United States. President Eisenhower himself took cognizance of the role which millions of our fellow citizens play in furthering foreign policy when he designated each recipient of an American passport as a "goodwill ambassador" of the United States.

How well are some of these "goodwill ambassadors" prepared for their new experience? Can they really handle questions about pressing issues in the United States such as racial segregation, defense spending, or juvenile delinquency? Are they prepared to discuss and honestly interpret the standard of living of Americans or their cultural values? How well can they communicate in any language except English? And do they know much about the setting, the institutions, the way of life in the very countries which they are visiting?

During the summer of 1957, with the assistance of the Council on Student Travel, the Netherlands Office of Foreign Student Relations, and the Cunard Line, the Maxwell School administered a questionnaire to passengers aboard thirteen ships en route to Europe from the United States. The purpose of the questionnaire was to take a snapshot of the "mental baggage" which a large group of young, highly motivated Americans carry into their first foreign experience. An effort was made, therefore, to collect relevant biographical data, such as family background and educational experience while testing for language proficiency and "orientation" to both Europe and the United States.

The Sample

More than one thousand questionnaires were collected and tabulated by the Maxwell School. None of the respondents had ever been outside the United States—with the possible exception of a short visit to Canada or across the Mexican border—and all the respondents were on their way to Europe. These questionnaires were then carefully sifted into a finer sample of 510 determined by age grouping, educational attainments, and a complete response to the questionnaire.

This was not an "average" group of United States citizens casually interrogated about their language skills or their orientation to foreign countries. The sample consisted of university-level Americans with a median age of twenty-two years. Their parents were mainly in the professional or the upper-business class of American society. No less than eighty percent came from families with incomes above the United States average. And every one of these 510 Americans were entering a foreign country within a few days after filling out the Maxwell School questionnaire.

Language Facility

Second generation Americans have repeatedly rejected their linguistic heritage in the pressure to melt into United States society and join native American peer groups. This well-known loss of foreign language communication appears even more vividly when surveying a group just about to visit the continent of their fathers. About twenty percent of the sample were the offspring of immigrants or had lived in homes where a foreign language was often spoken. Yet *fewer than five percent* of these second-generation Americans claimed to speak the language with any facility.

The most important question about foreign language skill, however, touched the preparation given for this first overseas experience by American high schools and colleges. Four hundred and seventy-two of the sample group of young Americans had had some training in a foreign language, ranging from six months to six years, the average being slightly over two years. Twenty percent of the respondents had studied two foreign languages. Given all the time they wanted, these four hundred and seventy-two young men and women were asked to translate the following paragraph into any foreign language:

I am going to Europe. My mother is at home. She will write to me often while I travel. There are many interesting things to do in a foreign country. I like to eat well, walk slowly through the streets, and spend the night in a clean, inexpensive hotel.

The overwhelming number of responses were in French, Spanish, and German, with a scattering of Italian, Yiddish, and Russian. There was no appreciable difference in competence between those who had heard a foreign language used in their homes and those who came from fully English-speaking parents or relatives. The final results were scored at Syracuse University as follows:

<u>Very Satisfactory</u>	<u>Awkward or Incomprehensible</u>	<u>No Attempt Made</u>
30%	49%	21%

Of these young goodwill ambassadors, therefore, all of whom had been exposed to a foreign language in secondary and/or collegiate education and all of whom had additional motivation to know a foreign language by virtue of the very trip on which they had embarked, only 30% could handle a simple paragraph of translation satisfactorily. One person in five did not attempt the translation or abandoned the effort after a scribble. Almost half the respondents were very faulty in elementary vocabulary or so inaccurate in word order, grammar, and sense as to be incomprehensible. These results were obtained through a written exercise without limitation of time. Certainly the instant verbalization of such phrases required by ordinary conversation would have produced even poorer results.

Orientation to Europe

Another test of the goodwill ambassadors was their orientation to Europe through a series of short, factual questions such as:

Which country produces more steel annually—France or Germany?

Does Poland have more or fewer people than Italy?

Where are Serbia and Croatia?

In which cities would you find the Louvre? the Colosseum?

Westminster? the Parthenon?

and so forth.

Twenty-nine questions were offered in this part of the questionnaire, touching upon geography, politics, economics, social mores, and foreign cultures. The results were scored at the Maxwell School as follows:

Well Oriented

37%

Very Superficial

56%

Poorly Oriented

7%

The answers were generously graded—with no requirement of correct spelling or absolutely precise data. When, for example, the university-level respondents were asked to name *any* Italian novelist, poet or painter in the last 150 years, seventy-six percent could not think of *one*, such as Manzoni, Carducci, Leopardi, Verga, D'Annunzio, or Malaparte, Levi, Silone, Moravia, or Modigliani. Almost fifty percent of the respondents could not recall a single writer from Germany in either the 19th or 20th century: such men as Goethe, Nietzsche, Hauptmann, Rilke, or Thomas Mann, to name a few.

More Americans have probably landed in France over the course of the last century than in any other country of Europe; French is still pursued more than any other foreign language in United States schools; there is good evidence that Americans know more about the history and literature of France than of any other non-English speaking country. Yet fifty percent of our select sample of young Americans en route to Europe believed that divorce was not allowed by law in France. And despite the contributions of Scandinavia to the American way of life and the fact that many of these travellers would soon be setting foot in one of the three Scandinavian countries, seventy percent of them could not name one country in which the state church was Lutheran.

The questionnaire also revealed that as soon as one turned from the main landmarks of our western European heritage, orientation knowledge declined rapidly; while most of the respondents knew where the Colosseum was, few apparently had heard of Madrid's great art museum, the Prado; and very few could identify Hagia Sophia, the mosque in Istanbul, Turkey which has been called "the supreme achievement of Byzantine Art, as well as one of the world's greatest buildings". At the time of administering the questionnaires North Africa was an intensely troubled center of European and American foreign policy. Yet ninety percent of the respondents had no idea where Berbers were to be found.

Orientation to the United States

Ambassadors of good will, even university-level students from the upper economic brackets who are en route to Europe, may possibly be excused for their unawareness of the history, geography, culture, or contemporary society of a foreign country. But the prime function of an ambassador is to represent his own country to the outside world. How well do our young Americans travelling abroad stack up as knowledgeable Americans?

Eleven fundamental questions were asked. Among them were:

In what year is the next U. S. presidential election?

About how many people live in the United States today?

Again the answers were scored generously. Precise figures were not sought, but some index to the image of the United States which these American travellers held and which, presumably, they might relay overseas. The results were sorted at the Maxwell School as follows:

<u>Well Oriented</u>	<u>Very Superficial</u>	<u>Poorly Oriented</u>
36%	47%	17%

The questions not only dealt with the composition of the American population, but also asked, for example, which American novelist—or poet—or playwright—the respondent would recommend to people he met abroad in order to reflect the contemporary way of life in the United States. Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and William Faulkner, were cited as novelists as well as Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, even Paddy Chayevsky and Howard Fast. But thirty percent of the respondents could not think of one important twentieth century American novelist. Among the playwrights the names of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill appeared most often, but about fifty percent of the respondents could think of no American playwright whom they might mention to foreign friends interested in the contemporary United States.

Comparisons between American and foreign standards of living form a vital part of understanding world politics. Pounds, francs, and lire can be translated into dollars to find out what a European family earns, but, for comparison, what is the average income of an American family? At the time of the questionnaire five thousand dollars a year would have been about right, but 16% of the sample thought that the average was over seven thousand dollars a year. More than two-thirds of these young Americans en route to Europe had very little idea of the Roman Catholic or Jewish composition of the United States population. Any answer between 24 million and 48 million for the Catholics was counted as correct; any answer between 4 million and 12 million was counted as correct for the Jews. Guesses about the Catholics ranged up to 75 million; guesses about the Jews were consistently higher than the acceptable range. And those respondents who couldn't distinguish between thousands or millions in their answers were simply not counted in the results.

No single aspect of American society is more widely discussed overseas than the role of the Negro in the United States. There is a bitter joke current in American circles in many foreign capitals of the world that whatever discussion an American abroad may begin—whether it be budgetary controls or soil conservation—the rejoinder is likely to be, “Yes, but what about your Negro problem?” One of the questions put to the young Americans going abroad for the first time was, “About how many Negroes would you say are in the United States?” Sixty percent of the respondents could not even make a close guess: any figure between 10 million and 25 million was acceptable, but only four out of ten in this selected sample of Americans going overseas had a rough idea of the number of Negroes in the United States.

Another prominent issue of American life especially interesting to people overseas, is the immigration policy of the United States. These travellers en route to Europe were asked, “About how many aliens a year do you think are admitted to the United States for permanent residence?” Any figure between 75,000 and 500,000 was considered reasonable. Yet 80% of the sample answers either had no idea or guessed outside the allowable range.

Education and Overseasmanship

An orientation questionnaire is a limited device for ascertaining types of information that a respondent has at the tip of his tongue. It is not an index of intelligence, but of interest. Many of these young Americans who could not recall population figures or famous novelists might have been able to reel off dozens of batting averages in the National League, describe an infinite variety of wild flowers, or recite every popular song on this week's Hit Parade.

We have no special interest in quiz contests. The mobilization of unrelated information without any capacity for organization and judgment is a trick performance of a blotter brain. But an American citizen who goes abroad is often appraised as a representative of the United States and he does interpret, consciously or not, the institutions and mores of his society. Without some background information about the United States he flounders in a sea of serious questions put to him by his foreign associates and fails to relate his observations to a dispassionate intellectual framework. Without an appreciation of the country which he is visiting, an American may plough into shallow judgments and atrocious insults. And without some linguistic skill he is forever limited in his communication to only one way of looking at the world.

Probably no test has yet been devised to indicate the honesty, the selflessness, the humor, or the human compassion which serve an individual so well at home or abroad. None of us would assert that proper orientation assures a successful goodwill ambassador. But it undoubtedly helps any United States citizen travelling, living, and working in a foreign country.

Direct gift (J)

Whether the schools and universities of the United States, engrossed with purely domestic problems or harried by the pressures for job-training, have fully taken into consideration the new international content of American life is the main question. If one and one-half million Americans are going abroad this year, and possibly more the next, should we not make every effort both in the academic curriculum and in special training programs to equip our "ambassadors" with the data and the discernment which promote good-will?

With the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Maxwell School of Syracuse University has been studying the educational disciplines and training programs that seem most relevant and useful to Americans at work abroad. About 1% of the entire United States population is overseas today—counting soldiers, civilian workers, and family dependents. There is good reason to believe that our educational system still falls short of preparing an adequate pool of qualified personnel to carry on the missions of government, business, and voluntary agencies outside the United States.

The Maxwell School has been collecting considerable data on the number and types of Americans at work abroad; it has been interviewing United States and foreign nationals around the world to discover what elements in the education, experience, and personality of Americans seems to contribute most to effective living and working overseas; and it is conducting an inventory and analysis of the existing programs in the United States for training overseas personnel for the government, business firms, religious and philanthropic agencies.

Copies of the orientation questionnaire used for the research on American students abroad are available to interested agencies. Write: Overseas Training Project, The Maxwell School, Syracuse University, Syracuse 10, N. Y.